



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

ROD BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

NEWS

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Governor Rod Blagojevich State of the State Address February 3, 2005

SPRINGFIELD – Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, distinguished guests, my fellow citizens.

Before I begin, I'd like to take a brief moment to recognize the 3,500 brave men and women from Illinois who are serving our country in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We honor their courage and sacrifice.

And we pray for them, for their families and for their safe return.

May God be with them.

Two years ago, we came to office with a mission to reform Illinois and restore faith in our government.

We had record deficits and an economy mired in a recession, the cost of health care and prescription drugs were going up, and the number of people covered was going down, our school system was spending more time on paperwork than on educating our kids, and there was more doubt than hope that we could turn things around.

But thanks to you and to the hard-working people of Illinois, I'm proud to say that the state of our state is strong and growing stronger.

Our economy is coming back. Last year, we created nearly 50,000 new jobs, and last month, the unemployment rate fell to its lowest level since October of 2001.

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We eliminated a \$2.5 billion budget deficit, just one year after eliminating a record \$5 billion budget deficit.

We cut the size of state government. We consolidated 20 state agencies. We have the smallest workforce in thirty years. And we cut government spending in areas outside of education and health care by more than \$3 billion.

We cut the cost of prescription drugs through our I-Save program and expanded health care to 100,000 more parents and children.

We raised the minimum wage by more than \$1 an hour, giving nearly 340,000 people a bigger paycheck so they can better provide for their families.

We made our highways safer, putting more than 100 new state troopers on the frontlines just last year, and we now have the lowest number of traffic fatalities since 1943.

We rescued twelve children through our new Amber Alert system and in the area of homeland security, Illinois has been recognized as a national leader for our Weapons of Mass Destruction teams.

I went to Washington and personally lobbied for approval of our hospital assessment plan. And it worked. In late December, we got some good news: \$490 million in new federal funding for our hospitals and nursing homes.

And after decades of bureaucracy and low achievement, we finally said enough to a school system that refused to put our kids first. We started cutting reams of red tape. Test scores are up. 17,000 more children can now go to pre-school. And we were able to invest more than a billion dollars in new education funding.

And we did it together. And we did it without asking the people to bail us out by paying more in income taxes or sales taxes.

We showed that in tough times we can make tough decisions. And we showed that in tough times, we can still move Illinois forward and help people build better lives.

Because whether you live in Pilsen, Plainfield, Peoria or Pinckneyville, all of us want the same things: a good job, a good education, access to health care, time with our family. And so the question for all of us here today is: what can we do to help the people of Illinois build better lives?

For children, it, of course, begins with a good education.

Last year, I asked you for the opportunity to bring major change to the State Board of Education. You gave us that opportunity. And we've run with it.

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We completely eliminated the teacher certification backlog, which kept almost 7,000 teachers in limbo, and soon, we expect to eliminate hundreds of pages of rules and regulations, and simplify hundreds more. We are making the teacher certification process easier, so instead of filling out up to a hundred pages of forms, teachers will only have to fill out two or three. This means teachers and principals can spend less time satisfying bureaucrats and more time teaching children.

We are streamlining school report cards, providing meals to 40,000 more children, and cutting agency spending and using the savings to help schools consolidate. We've made it easier for kids in foster care to attend school, helped the Chicago Public Schools save their after school tutoring program, and in the Metro East area, we started a charter school so the high school kids in Venice can go to a school in their own community.

I am pleased to report to you that the process of change and reform at the State Board of Education is well underway.

And there's another thing I want the State Board of Education to do. Over the last two years, we expanded funding so that 17,000 kids who weren't able to attend pre-school now can attend pre-school. That's been a priority of mine, of Senate President Emil Jones, and of many of you in this chamber.

But did you know that if you're a child of an undocumented immigrant, you're not eligible to attend a publicly funded pre-school? That's not what the American Dream is supposed to be about. That's wrong and we're going to change that.

So I am asking the State Board of Education when they meet this month to vote to give every child in Illinois, including the children of undocumented immigrants, the right to go to pre-school.

And the same goes for health care. Health care is not a privilege, it's a right, and giving everyone access to health care is not only the right thing to do, it's the moral thing to do.

During the first two years of my administration, we have made expanding health care a principle upon which we would not compromise.

While other states have dealt with their budget deficits by retreating on health care, here in Illinois, we've advanced. So much so, that according to the Kaiser Foundation, Illinois now leads the nation in providing health care to children and working parents who otherwise wouldn't have it.

Last year, we watched spring turn to summer and stayed here in Springfield working in the longest overtime session in our state's history. We can all take great pride in that, and I'll tell you why. Because last year alone, thanks to the budget we enacted, 56,000 more men, women and children who didn't have health care, now have health care today.

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And as for the cost of the medicine your doctor says you need, well, now in Illinois, you can get that same medicine made by the exact same company but now you can get it for 25-50% less. Every resident of Illinois can be a member of our I-Save Rx program. It doesn't cost anything to join. It's safe. It's affordable. And it's a way to help people afford the medicine they can't afford now.

And let me tell you something else. We're just not going to sit back and continue to allow the big, powerful pharmaceutical industry to price gouge the senior citizens and working people of our state. People should be able to afford the medicine they need and they should be able to get the best price they can for it. That's what our I-Save program does. And the more people who know about it, the more people we can help.

But it's not just our seniors who are struggling with the high cost of health care. Ask any woman and she'll tell you: health care for women is more expensive than it is for men. In fact, during their reproductive years, women spend 68% more on health care than men do. But thanks to some of the things we've been able to accomplish together, that's starting to change.

The law now requires private insurance companies to cover female contraceptives. That's never been done before in Illinois. But we did it. And now women can save, on average, \$400 each year.

And that's not all we've been doing. We've expanded funding for breast cancer screenings, cervical cancer screenings and HIV/AIDS prevention. We created the Illinois Healthy Women program to help women avoid unplanned pregnancies.

But we can't make health care more accessible or more affordable if we can't keep doctors in our state. We need medical malpractice reform and we need it now. We can protect the personal assets of doctors, preserve the rights of injured people to bring their claims, and make sure insurance companies reduce their premiums.

Last session we tried to get something done. Nothing. I appointed a mediator this fall. Nothing. Only gridlock.

I know the lawyers are well represented around here. So is the medical society. And the hospital association. And the insurance industry. All of them wield a lot of influence.

But the Constitution gives us the power to make the rules. So let's do it. Let us pass real, meaningful medical malpractice reform; reform that protects doctors, lowers the cost of their insurance premiums, and encourages them to practice medicine in Illinois.

And while we're at it, we also need more nurses. There is a nursing shortage here just like there is across America. So I want to do two things. First, we are issuing \$5 million in grants so we can train more than 1,500 new nurses. And second, I'm directing the Department of Professional Regulation to make the licensing process easier for experienced nurses who are interested in relocating to Illinois from other states and from other countries.

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But for people to build better lives, they need more than access to health care. They need the opportunity to earn a good living. They need the opportunity to have a good job.

Over the past two years, we've negotiated over 200 deals with companies to create and retain jobs throughout our state.

We've brought Target to DeKalb, Ameriquest to Schaumburg, PetsMart to Ottawa, Supervalu to Urbana, and Hospira to Lake Forest. We brought Hershey Foods to Edwardsville and kept 600 Wells Fargo jobs right here in Springfield. We helped DemirCo expand in Decatur, helped NTN Bower expand in Macomb, helped Hormel expand in Rochelle, and helped CCL expand in Danville. We helped Aisin expand in Marion, helped Ford expand in Chicago, and Chrysler expand in Belvidere. And we convinced BP Amoco to locate the headquarters for their new chemical subsidiary in Chicago.

We expanded funding for job training and worker development, so businesses have access to the skilled workforce they need. We created the Illinois Finance Authority to offer low interest loans to businesses interested in coming to our state.

We created Opportunity Returns, launched six regional plans already, and next week, we're launching new plans for the Central, East Central and Southeast regions.

We've already completed almost half of the Opportunity Returns projects. We've invested in small businesses like Maytag Herrin in Marion and Jaros Technologies in Collinsville. We built new entrepreneurship centers in Champaign, Macomb, Galesburg and in the Quad Cities, and we are creating a technology incubator in Peoria. And with your help, we can do even more.

These efforts are paying off.

Last year, 50,000 new jobs were created, hotel/motel receipts are up 11%, and I'm proud to say that the unemployment rate in Illinois has dropped to 5.8%, the lowest it has been since the aftermath of September 11th.

We held our ground, we said no to income tax increases, we said no to sales tax increases, and as the economy is starting to turn the corner, now is the time to seize the moment.

So today, we're seizing the moment with a new plan intended to help businesses reduce their costs, take advantage of our state's natural resources, and attract new industries. We will do whatever it takes to bring good jobs to every county in Illinois. And how will we do it?

By working to bring the growing homeland security industry to Illinois.

By building the biggest coal plant built in the United States in the last twenty years.

By building the world's largest wind farm.

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By developing the wine industry in Central and Southern Illinois.

By improving trade with other nations.

By building a South Suburban Airport in Peotone.

By taking on workers compensation costs.

By cutting needless regulations and red tape.

By creating one stop shopping for businesses who need state services.

By helping small businesses afford the high cost of health insurance.

And by not raising the personal income tax, or the corporate income tax, or the sales tax, so Illinois continues to be a place where businesses want to come.

Last year, the federal government, states, cities, and the private sector spent more than \$100 billion on homeland security needs, ranging from the filters that protect us from viruses and toxins to the wireless tracking devices that monitor the cargo on our ships. This is a growing industry. And the products that will keep America safe should be made right here in Illinois.

And why not Illinois?

Located in the center of the country, on the Great Lakes, connected to the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, home to O'Hare Airport and the nation's railroad hub, Illinois is the perfect place to do this.

We have a trained and eager workforce, a strong manufacturing infrastructure, excellent transportation, top notch military bases, and some of the best universities and research institutions in the world.

And we are working to bring these jobs to Illinois.

We are creating a division within the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity whose sole purpose is to encourage companies that make homeland security products to either come to Illinois or expand in Illinois. We're going to take existing tax credits and programs, and use them in new ways to give companies that make homeland security products the financial incentives they need to make their products here.

I'm asking our universities to work with us to develop a curriculum that trains our students to work in the homeland security industry. The better our workforce understands their industry, the more likely companies are to locate here.

And our military bases can serve as testing grounds for new homeland security products. It's

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critical that we do everything possible to not only keep our bases open, but that we expand them and make them more useful than ever. This initiative makes that possible.

Who knows? If we're successful, we might be able to produce gas masks in Rockford, make filters in Quincy, or develop sensors in Peoria. Because I don't know about you – but God forbid another attack occurs, it would be nice to know that when the firefighters in Collinsville put on their equipment, the masks they slip on their faces read "Made in America."

Part of protecting our homeland means being less dependent on foreign countries for our energy. We have to be more energy self-sufficient. We can do that and create more jobs by turning to two things we have plenty of: wind and coal.

I am going to ask the Illinois Commerce Commission to increase the standard portion of our energy that comes from renewable sources like wind. And I'm going to ask the Illinois Finance Authority to look at new ways to provide financing for wind farms.

Our goal is to have 3,000 megawatts of wind power up and running by 2012. That's enough power for one million households. That's good for the environment and it's good for our economy.

Doing this could mean 1,000 new jobs over the next two years. It could mean \$2 billion in new investment over the next decade. And it could mean building the largest wind farm in the world in McLean County. We will submit our plan to the Illinois Commerce Commission next week, and I hope they approve it quickly.

And speaking of the environment, new technology gives us the opportunity to both mine Illinois coal and protect the environment. In the old days, you couldn't mine Illinois coal and protect the quality of our air. Now you can.

Peabody Energy is building a \$2 billion clean coal power plant in Washington County – a coal plant that's nearly three times cleaner than any coal plant built in Illinois. In fact, this is the biggest coal plant to be built in the nation in the last twenty years, and it's one of the largest projects ever built in the history of downstate Illinois.

This project will also create jobs.

2,500 new construction jobs, 450 new mining and operations jobs, and even more jobs will be on the way when new transmission lines are built. And these aren't just new jobs, they're also jobs that pay very good wages. The average salary will be over \$55,000 a year. And this coal plant will be one of the cleanest coal plants built in the entire country. Peabody Energy is spending more than \$500 million on new technology that control emissions and protect the environment.

We are doing our part by providing permits from the EPA, grants from the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, and more than \$1.7 billion in financing from the Illinois Finance Authority.

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And as we revive the coal industry, it cannot come at the expense of the environment. We need to reduce emissions that come from old, coal-fired plants. But if we unilaterally change emission standards, we put our power producers at a major competitive disadvantage, jeopardize the stability of the power grid, and since air knows no boundaries, we still face pollution from our five bordering states.

That's why our EPA is taking the lead by talking to the other Midwestern states about developing a regional emission standard for older coal plants. If we work together, we can protect jobs and the environment. In a few weeks, my tenure as Chair of the Midwest Governors Association begins, and I intend to make developing a regional standard to reduce coal emissions one of the top items on our agenda.

And speaking of air, what about airports?

O'Hare is the nation's busiest airport. It is the economic jewel of Chicago. It is also the economic jewel of our state. But, one of every four flights at O'Hare is delayed. We have to expand O'Hare airport, and nothing should stand in its way.

However, considering the explosive growth in Will County and the South Suburbs, expanding O'Hare isn't enough. We need another airport. And, if we build it, we can create 15,000 jobs in an area of our state that desperately needs jobs.

So I say let's build the Peotone Airport.

Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr.'s plan to build the Abraham Lincoln National Airport at Peotone will not compete with O'Hare for needed federal dollars, and during tough fiscal times like these, his plan to use private investment is both a welcome and innovative way to build an airport. I strongly support it. And I hope you do too.

In addition to Congressman Jackson, people like Will County Executive Larry Walsh and Senator Debbie Halvorson have a strong interest in the area. They know better than anyone what this airport means for the economy of Will County and the South Suburbs. I want to submit a plan to the FAA by this spring so people can start working and planes can start flying. A few weeks ago, I spent a couple of days in Southern Illinois. It was a great visit. I met with community leaders who have come together and developed a shared regional vision for the growth of their economy. Part of that vision includes making Southern Illinois a tourist destination.

And one way to bring more tourists to the southern part of our state is to help the nascent wine industry in Illinois. That's why we should develop a campaign to promote Illinois wine. It's why we should fund research into production methods and product testing. It's why we should provide business consulting for Illinois wineries, and it's why I intend to declare September "Illinois Wine Month."

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Another way to expand our economy is to expand our trade, because the more trade we conduct, the more jobs we create.

Illinois' industries export to nations across the world. We export machines, chemicals, and agricultural commodities. A couple of weeks ago, Speaker Madigan presented an idea to me to help increase our trade. His proposal calls for the creation of the Illinois Business Council. The council will be made up of business leaders throughout Illinois. They will host monthly leadership forums, create trade missions, help businesses enter new world markets, represent Illinois at trade shows, and market and promote our agricultural products. I like this idea because promoting trade is always better when it comes from the private sector.

The six ideas I just outlined will help bring new jobs to Illinois. But we also have to reduce the cost of doing business. One way to do it is by reforming our workers compensation system.

Illinois is the 19th most expensive state in the nation when it comes to workers compensation premiums. In fact, Illinois companies pay 40% more for workers comp than Michigan, Wisconsin and Indiana. We have to bring those costs down, and we can if we're willing to embrace reform.

The first reform is to get fraud out of the system. According to the National Insurance Crime Bureau, fraud in workers compensation cases costs employers \$6.5 billion a year. Yet Illinois is only 1 of 11 states that does virtually nothing to stop it. How can that be? Who can be against fighting fraud? There's fraud throughout the system: from phony claims to doctors who over-bill to insurers who won't pay. We need to crack down on workers compensation fraud. So I am asking you to pass a law that creates an anti-fraud unit with real investigatory and subpoena powers.

We also have to find new ways to bring down costs. So I'm asking business leaders and labor leaders to come together and work with us on legislation that would lower workers compensation costs.

We should consider setting provider fee schedules, so we know what medical providers can and can't charge. We should set hospital payment regulations, so there's consistency to what hospitals charge and what employers pay.

And we should require insurance companies to pay medical providers directly, instead of making the workers responsible. Every other state does this, and they do it for good reason: it prevents workers from having their treatment stopped while they fight with the insurance company over paying medical bills.

We can also reduce costs for businesses if we start cutting red tape and reduce regulations. You shouldn't have to know which state agency does what -- just to get the forms you need to manage your business.

So starting today, I'm happy to announce that our one stop shop is open for business. On our

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new website -- business.illinois.gov -- you can get your questions answered. You can download forms, licenses, and permits, and find information about different programs and incentives -- and you can do it easily and efficiently because the information they need is just a click away.

The first version of the site is up today, and we're going to keep expanding the site over the next year to make sure that doing business in Illinois keeps getting easier.

We're also creating a committee to review the burdensome rules and regulations that businesses face to see what we can eliminate, streamline or simplify, just as we're doing at the State Board of Education.

We're going to talk to business owners around the state to find out which rules and regulations they find excessive. We'll see whether they're really necessary or whether they can be made easier. This will be an on-going process, and as we learn of ways to reduce the regulatory burden on businesses, we will.

Finally, we have to help businesses save money on the high cost of health insurance. This is a problem that's only getting worse. Health care premiums for companies have risen by nearly 11% in the last year alone.

Let me give you a real life example. General Packaging Products has 100 employees in Chicago. In 1999, they spent \$215,000 on health care costs. Last year, they spent \$575,000 to insure the same number of employees. In 1999, employees with families at General Packaging spent \$10 per week on their insurance. Today, they spend \$49. And William Kellogg, the owner of General Packaging, spends an additional \$65,000 each year to give his employees free eye, ear and dental checkups.

Things can't keep going this way. It's not good for business and it's not good for families. That's why we're working with the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce and the Peoria Area Chamber of Commerce to help small businesses save money on the cost of health insurance.

Here's what they do in Cleveland: 14,000 businesses, with 88,000 employees, save 15 percent on their health care costs by pooling their resources, and leveraging their buying power to lower their rates and reduce their expenses.

What we're proposing is a first time partnership between the State of Illinois and local Chambers of Commerce. It's modeled after what they're doing in Cleveland, only we would do it on a statewide level.

It's never been done before. And bringing down the cost of health insurance isn't going to be quick or easy. We're venturing into uncharted territory. But as the old adage says "nothing ventured, nothing gained." Adopting the Cleveland model gives us a chance to both help businesses save money and help more people get health insurance. We ought to give it a try.

Things are getting better. The economy has turned the corner. Tomorrow offers an abundance

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of possibilities and our jobs agenda will help us seize the moment.

But building a better life isn't just about having a good job or having good health care. It's about the quality of your life. How you live it. It's about being able to spend more time with your family. Nothing is more important than that.

It's the motivation behind our 10 year, \$5.3 billion plan to rebuild the entire Tollway system.

Yes, the plan means we will be able to knock down the toll booths and make Illinois the first state in the nation to bring Open Road Tolling to its entire system.

Yes, it means we will be able to add lanes to I-90 and I-294. Yes, it means we will be able to finally build I-355. Yes, it means we will create 252,000 new jobs, including 42,000 jobs this year alone. And yes, it means we can reduce carbon monoxide emissions by more than 40%.

But more important than all of that, it means parents can get home from work a little earlier, and spend a little more time with their children.

And we're doing the same thing across Illinois. We're improving I-74 in Peoria and rebuilding the McKinley Bridge near Granite City. We're upgrading Route 136 in Carthage, and fixing I-72 in Decatur, I-24 in Johnson County, I-39 in Rockford and the North Dirksen Parkway in Springfield.

That extra time can make all the difference in the world if it means helping your daughter with her homework or making it to your son's basketball game before the opening tip off. And it's even more important for single parents.

Today in Illinois, there are more than 300,000 single moms, struggling to make a living while raising their children, and doing this all by themselves. They shouldn't have to spend their free time hunting down the child support they're owed. They've got enough to do already.

Over the past two years, we've increased child support collections by more than \$100 million. And last year, we set a record by collecting \$950 million in delinquent child support payments. That's the largest dollar amount ever collected in Illinois. And this year, if present trends continue, we are on pace to collect over a billion dollars in outstanding child support. In Illinois, we are finally making deadbeat dads do what they're supposed to do: pay the child support they owe.

But we can do more. One of the greatest challenges in collecting child support is that deadbeat dads move from job to job and state to state. It's hard to keep track of them. So I'm directing the Department of Public Aid to help business owners identify which of their employees owe child support and when they identify them, immediately garnish their wages, so the money goes where it's supposed to go: to help support their children.

The Department of Public Aid will distribute almost 300,000 new handbooks to businesses.

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They will call employers, email them, track them down and make sure they know that their employees have responsibilities not just to the company, but to their children too.

And speaking of children, just before the holidays, I met with several moms in Naperville. They have kids at home, and like all moms, they worry about their children. Are they safe? Are they healthy? Are they eating their vegetables? Are they doing their homework? Who are they hanging around with? And what kind of games do they play?

Kids today are technologically sophisticated. In many families, they are far ahead of their parents. That's certainly the case with me.

Parents have a right to know what their kids are doing, and they have a right to know what games their children are playing, and what hidden dangers may be in those games.

For the same reason we don't allow kids to buy pornography, for the same reason we don't allow kids to buy cigarettes, for the same reason we don't allow kids to buy alcohol, we shouldn't allow them to go to stores and buy video games – video games that teach them to do the very things we put people in jail for – pick up prostitutes, join street gangs, kill police officers, even assassinate President Kennedy.

Buying these games should be up to parents, not children.

And don't believe the excuse that we don't need to act because stores won't sell these games to kids, because they do. And if you don't believe me, just ask Representative Paul Froehlich. Representative Froehlich just conducted a sting operation and found that 75% of the time, stores were willing to sell kids video games even though those games are not rated suitable for children. And what Representative Froehlich found here in Illinois was consistent with studies conducted nationwide by the Federal Trade Commission.

So I'm asking you to join me in helping parents by passing a bill that makes it illegal for kids to buy excessively violent and sexually explicit video games: video games where kids spend their free time simulating acts of murder, rape, decapitation, and dismemberment.

We also need to do more to help our veterans. For decades, Illinois' veterans have been shortchanged by the federal government. It's time we fight for those who fought for us. I'm proposing we increase the field staff at our Department of Veterans Affairs by 50% so we can do more to help veterans apply for and receive federal benefits. If we do this correctly, we can help Illinois' one million veterans collect over \$400 million in additional federal benefits each year.

Although I've announced a number of different ideas and programs, it all comes down to one basic concept: the responsibility of this government is to give families what they need to prosper.

If we can help people earn a good living, help businesses reduce their costs, if we can respect and protect people's paychecks, if we can give kids a good education, if we can give everyone access to good health care, keep people safe, and give families more time for the things that really

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matter, then we truly can deliver on our promise to the people of Illinois.

The last two years have been a good start. We've made our schools and the State Board of

Education more accountable. We've provided significantly more funding and resources. We are leading the nation in offering health care to people who need it, we've brought down the cost of prescription drugs for seniors and the uninsured, helped our hospitals and nursing homes, and we've given women better health care options.

We've made Illinois the best state in the nation when it comes to protecting our homeland security. We've made our highways safer, and added more state troopers.

We've turned the corner on the economy, created 50,000 new jobs last year, brought down the unemployment rate, and given women and those who work for the minimum wage a chance at a better life. We've launched a plan to rebuild our roads and help families spend more time together.

We've done a lot, but there's still more to do. I've outlined a plan to do it. But I need your help.

We can only accomplish all of this if we work together. We won't agree on every idea. We won't share all of the same values or priorities. But if we keep in mind just a few simple goals: better schools, affordable health care, safe communities, good jobs, and the value of family -- we can help people build better lives.

I'd like to conclude with an invitation: the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum will open on April 19. It will be the best Presidential Library and Museum in the nation, befitting the nation's greatest President. It will be an economic engine for Springfield and a point of pride for all of Illinois. I'd like all of you to join me at the opening.

Yes, there is more work to be done. But as Lincoln said, "The best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time." If we remain determined to succeed, we can touch the lives of everyone in Illinois, and we will be better a state for it.

Thank you, God bless the people of Illinois, and God bless the United States of America.